

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

December 15, 2015

President Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

As the nation continues to mourn in the aftermath of the horrific events that occurred in San Bernardino, California, we urge you to immediately direct screening officials to include social media screening in all background checks. The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) confirmed Tashfeen Malik, one of the attackers who immigrated to the United States from Pakistan on a spousal visa, had posted social media messages professing her radicalization, information which could have prevented the deaths of 14 Americans. Even more troubling, recent reports allege that screening officials, by policy, generally do not check social media postings of applicants.


While we encourage DHS in the wake of this attack to implement reforms for stricter screening procedures to ensure national security, we are perplexed at federal agency policy regarding social media. In an era where a growing number of communications takes place on Internet platforms, it would be foolish to ignore this goldmine of information. We understand that social media entries cannot be dispositive, but to ignore the information out of hand is unreasonable.

Even more troubling is DHS Secretary Jeh Johnson's decision in early 2014 to not end the secret U.S. policy that prohibited immigration officials from reviewing the social media messages of all foreign citizens applying for U.S. visas, according to a former senior department official. An outright prohibition is foolhardy, as evidenced by the California attacks, and must be reversed immediately.

We urge you to immediately adopt regulations to allow screening officials to check the social media postings of applicants. Knowledge is power, and denying your employees the ability to gain knowledge through basic research strips them of the full potential of their power to screen these applicants. If you are still clinging to an outdated policy prohibiting such review, then we would ask you to brief Congress on why your agency refuses to consider communications like the kind Tashfeen Malik made before she killed 14 people and injured 22 others.

We thank you kindly for your time and look forward to your response.

Sincerely,



Joe Manchin III
United States Senator



Mark Kirk
United States Senator